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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the two 2000 issues of a newsletter addressing the administrative concerns of child-care centers, learning centers, preschools, nursery schools, kindergartens, and intergenerational centers. Issue 220 features an interview with Rob Reiner regarding the "I Am Your Child" campaign and articles on how one center developed effective teams and on organizing paperwork. This issue also includes readers' ideas regarding problems with parents, an author interview on business trends, and suggestions for books for parents and teachers. Issue 221 features articles on working effectively with boards of directors, on a motor-based preschool curriculum designed to include children with disabilities, and on conducting parent surveys. This issue also includes a forum for readers' opinions on various controversial issues affecting the early childhood field. (KB)

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Issue 221

Christine Kalbaugh, Editor

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JCCA JOURNAL OF CHILD-CARE ADMINISTRATION

Issue 220

A National Publication Addressing The Concerns Of:
Child-care Centers Learning Centers Preschools Nursery Schools Kindergartens Intergenerational Centers

CONTENTS

Speaking With Rob Reiner 1
Staff Teams in Child Care: Child's Day Development Center 5
Tips on Organizing Your Paperwork 8
Being an Entrepreneur: Interview With Mary Hessler Key 11
Problems With Parents: Joining The Dialogue 13
Books for Parents and Teachers 14

SPEAKING WITH ROB REINER

Introduction

Rob Reiner has been known and respected by the American public for many years. Recently, JCCA spoke with him

Born in New York, he later moved to Beverly Hills, California, where he attended high school. He studied theater at the University of California at Los Angeles.

Before beginning his acting career, he was a writer for the innovative and highly popular "Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour" television show.

As a young actor, he was often cast as "anti-establishment" characters. The epitome of this trend was his role as Michael Stivic in the landmark TV series, "All in the Family," for which he won two Emmys.

He went on to distinguish himself as a movie actor and a prolific and highly successful producer and director. His films, which include "The Princess Bride," "A Few Good Men," "Ghosts of Mississippi" and "The American President," tend to be positive, pro-family and pro-society.

Besides his Emmys, he has won other awards for his work in television and films. In October 1999, he was honored with a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame beside the star for his father—writer, performer and director Carl Reiner.

Public Service

Fame, tremendous success and critical praise, however, didn't satisfy all of Rob Reiner's needs. Belying the stereotypical image of a shallow, self-absorbed Hollywood personality, he is serious and thoughtful.

He felt himself drawn to the service of young children.

In 1998, he orchestrated the successful effort to pass Proposition 10 in California. The proposition raised cigarette taxes an additional fifty cents per pack, with the aim of gaining hundreds of millions of dollars each year to fund services for children from the prenatal stage to age five.

He was chosen in 1999 by Gray Davis, governor of California, to head a state commission to guide the new programs, which are designed to provide comprehensive, integrated services including immunizations, vision and hearing tests, infant and maternal nutrition, programs to prevent domestic violence, health care, social services and child care.

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Founder of *I Am Your Child*

In addition to the state projects, Rob Reiner heads a major national campaign designed to help young children.

In 1997, with his wife, Michele Singer Reiner, and Ellen Gilbert, he founded the *I Am Your Child* campaign, which is dedicated to educating the American public about the crucial importance of the earliest years of life. A major goal is to inspire the nation to make early childhood development a top priority and invest far more of its resources in young children.

Rob Reiner chairs the campaign, which comprises a coalition of almost 200 organizations, including **JCCA**, and individuals from various fields.

Childhood Influences

It might seem surprising that someone growing up in Rob Reiner's circumstances would be drawn to social causes. The home in which he, his sister Sylvia and brother Lucas were raised was certainly not typically middle-class. Not only were there financial advantages, but often the visitors were unusual as well. **"Not many households had Mel Brooks coming over,"** he acknowledges.

However, despite his father's celebrity and the privileged environment, he credits his upbringing with shaping his ethics and his view of the world.

His parents were deeply involved in serious public issues. Both opposed the Vietnam War in the 1970s. His father joined anti-war protests, and his mother, Estelle, was active in the group, "Another Mother for Peace," and helped to create its famous slogan, "War is Hazardous to Children and Other Living Things."

"I was raised by two very socially conscious parents," Rob Reiner says. "Both my mother and father were very involved in social causes. They were ethical, moral people with tremendous integrity. There was no pretension or hypocrisy."

Choosing A Cause

Of the many ways he could have elected to perform public service, why did Rob Reiner choose young children as his cause? **"I didn't choose it as much as it chose me,"** he says. "It's a way of trying to get public investment in young children and get social change.

"We know that if we significantly improve young children's lives, it pays off tremendously in later years. We see reduction in major problems of society, like crime, teen pregnancy, child abuse and welfare. We can improve almost every facet of life.

"I've been thinking about early childhood development for almost twenty years. During a bad period in my life, I went through therapy, and I realized that early childhood experiences have a profound effect on the kind of adult you become.

"Several years ago, I learned about research around the country. I was particularly impressed by the 1994 Carnegie 'Starting Points' report. It showed me what I had instinctively felt was true — that our early experiences shape how we turn out as adults."

Personal Observations

What has Rob Reiner learned since becoming personally involved in helping young children? "In my work as head of the governor's commission," he says, "I've learned that everything I suspected to be true was true. **All aspects of a child's life are interrelated. Child care, health care, parent education — you have to link these services.**

"I've visited many on-site child-care programs that have approached child care in an integrated, comprehensive way that is tremendously effective.

"Elizabeth Street [in Cudahy, California] is a school that is a wonderful model. It looks at education in a continuum backwards, not just as K to 12. **Early childhood is looked on as part of a continuum, part of an educational process from birth through twelfth grade.**"

"We know that if we significantly improve young children's lives, it pays off tremendously in later years. We see reduction in major problems of society, like crime, teen pregnancy, child abuse and welfare. We can improve almost every facet of life."

Other high schools in the area have dropout rates as high as forty percent, while Elizabeth Street School has achieved a ninety-five percent graduation rate, with ninety percent of its graduates going on to post-secondary school. "It's an extraordinary turnaround, and it was accomplished by making children from zero to five part of the continuum.

"It created links to a health clinic, to parent education and literacy classes. It provides a real support system for parents; creates a desired community. It builds a community from the ground up.

"**It's a perfect example of real educational reform, done from the ground up**.

"Through my work, I discovered that the idea of public education is a relatively new concept. It's a little over one hundred years old. It was necessary because we were going from a rural, agrarian society to an industrial society, and we needed a better-educated workforce.

"Now that we're going from the Industrial Age to the Information Age, we more than ever need a society that is well educated.

"**We need to have teachable children**. **It's all part of a continuum**. Before this, when preschool children weren't included in the thinking, one component was overlooked."

Raising Children

What are Rob Reiner's views regarding a child's home environment?

"**I think the most important thing is that the child gets securely and lovingly attached early on in life**.

"If there's an absence of stress, hostility and negative influences in a household, with no abuse or neglect, a child obviously has a far better chance.

"Children need parents without drug, alcohol or emotional problems who can freely love them. They need to be responded to quickly and with love, with no hitting or fighting.

"Unfortunately, we know that not all homes are like that. That's why we as a society have to help."

Group Care

Rob Reiner's children have been to preschool. He has one daughter and two sons. Were he and his wife pleased with the care their children received? "Absolutely," he says. "but I have the resources to get good child care. Many people aren't so fortunate."

How important does he consider child-care centers to be for our society? "**If we look at the history of the human race anthropologically, we see that we're meant to live in groups**.

"The I Am Your Child campaign will last until we as a nation invest in children prenatal to five as much as we do in those from K to twelve."

"There was always the extended family, all helping to support the raising of children.

"In the last fifty to one hundred years, there has been dissolution of those living groups.

"We need to build an infrastructure for young children, so that they can have those experiences. **We have to recreate those living groups**."

When Will The Campaign End?

Rob Reiner says, "**I'm committed to promoting early childhood development**.

"The *I Am Your Child* campaign will last until we as a nation invest in children prenatal to five as much as we do in those from K to twelve.

"We plan to work toward that goal in **three major ways**. They are to:

- Raise awareness about the importance of the early years,
- Get the information to parents and caregivers, and
- Affect public policy and promote investment in young children.

"**It will be a sea change**. Nobody doesn't accept that we should invest in public education. What we have to make people understand is that we have to invest in prenatal to five as much as K to twelve. **And it's measured not just by dollars, but by public commitment**."

Success To Date

How successful has the *I Am Your Child* campaign

been so far?

"Since it began in 1997," Rob Reiner says, "we've distributed over 1,500,000 videos. There are other signs, too, that we're getting the message across. For example, a poll we did with Parents magazine asked, 'Which do you think are the most important years of child development?' Seventy-five percent said the first three years, and ninety-five percent said the first six years.

"**Another way to measure its success is that when I travel, as many people come to me to talk about my work for early childhood as about my films.**"

In May 2000, Rob Reiner was awarded the Dean's Award for Distinguished Service by Columbia University's College of Physicians & Surgeons, for his contributions through the campaign.

Campaign Project

In June 2000, *I Am Your Child* began providing a "Welcome Baby Kit" to every parent and caregiver in California.

"Each kit has five videos and brochures in English and Spanish, with resource and referral guides," Rob Reiner explains. "They are on *parenting in the early years*, *quality child care*, *health and nutrition*, *safety* and *early literacy*. A sixth will be added, on *discipline*.

"After we do this in California, we hope to do the same for all of America. We'll make the kits available to every state; it's relatively inexpensive.

"With Proposition 10 funds, we hope to also distribute the kits to clinics, hospitals and ob-gyns in California."

Being A Leader

As owners and directors are leaders, we asked Rob Reiner to share some of what he has learned about leadership through directing films, shepherding a highly controversial measure into state law and heading a national campaign to benefit children.

"**The most important thing is to have an overview; be able to see the whole picture**. If you have that capability, you can get a lot done.

"You don't need to know how to do everything, but you need a feel for a lot of different areas, so that you can bring it all together.

"**You have to bring people together, too**. When you have a project with disparate elements, you have to encourage people to cooperate. Each person may have to sacrifice some of his or her area.

"**As a leader, you need to step back**. You have to be sure that the 'perfect' is not an enemy of the good. You have to learn to compromise."

Our Profession

In 1997, Rob Reiner opened the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children with a keynote address titled, "The First Years Last Forever."

"There were so many wonderful people there, dedicated to the development of young children," he says. "We want to raise the profession's profile; make it part of a community continuum, not an ad hoc effort.

"**It's the most important work anyone can be doing.**"

For more information on *I Am Your Child*, or to order materials, contact:

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www.iamyourchild.org

From "**Rethinking the Brain.**" by Rima Shore:

On early intervention:

In some cases, effective intervention efforts can even ameliorate conditions once thought to be virtually untreatable, such as autism or mental retardation.

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The efficacy of early intervention has been demonstrated and replicated in diverse communities across the nation. Children from families with the least formal education appear to derive the greatest cognitive benefits from intervention programs. Moreover, the impact of early intervention appears to be long-lasting, particularly when there is follow-up during the elementary school years.

"Rethinking the Brain" is published by Familes and Work Institute, and is available through *I Am Your Child.*

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Staff Teams in Child Care: Child's Day Development Center

*This is the fourth in a series of periodic **JCCA** articles describing how different centers interpret and implement the team concept. For this article, we spoke with Kathy Proctor.*

Introduction

Kathy Proctor is executive director of Child's Day Development Center in Austin, Texas. The center is NAEYC-accredited and is licensed for 170 children from two months to six years.

What Is A Team?

There are **three categories of teams** at Child's Day.

Although the center is informally divided into infant/toddler and preschool sections for supervisory purposes, the team dynamic is emphasized among the **entire staff**.

The **management team** — the executive director, director and the two owners — meets twice weekly to discuss staff, challenging children and strategic planning.

The staff members in **each classroom** are a team. Some classrooms have two teachers; others three.

Who Is On A Classroom Team?

The **lead teacher** is responsible for creating the curriculum and putting it into effect. Developmentally-based educational programs are implemented with the help and input of two assistants.

Of the eleven hours the center is open each day, the lead teacher spends from six to eight hours in the classroom, teaching and supervising.

The **first assistant teacher** helps the lead teacher execute the program. Besides teaching and otherwise interacting with the children, the first assistant contributes to planning and assists in whatever ways the two agree will be helpful.

The first assistant is in charge whenever the lead teacher is absent.

The **second assistant teacher** is a "floater" who can be utilized in various areas of the school, but is assigned one "home" room.

This person has a fluid schedule and is used as needed. Typical duties include filling in on breaks and lunch time and helping with office tasks.

The second assistant interacts with children but generally doesn't teach, although he or she may be given specific teaching tasks, like redoing a science experiment that a child missed.

The second assistant is expected to spend three to four hours each day in the "home" classroom, where duties may include greeting parents, doing light housekeeping and tidying the classroom for the morning.

How Are Teams Chosen?

Teachers are asked to state which age groups they'd prefer to work with and which staff members they'd like on their teams. Not all get their first choices, but every effort is made to accommodate them, says Kathy Proctor.

In putting the teams together, she tries to partner people who are compatible and at the same time complement each other's qualities. "**I try to match personalities. I look at how they will appeal to the children**. For example, I might pair an experienced lead teacher with a young, energetic first assistant."

"It takes almost a whole year to build a good communication system. To go through the stages of team development takes time."

Classroom teams are formed in August, at the beginning of each year-round school term. Everyone is asked to choose very carefully, as each teacher is expected to make a commitment to stay in the same room for the year.

Teams are also encouraged to remain together year after year if possible. "It takes almost a whole year

to build a good communication system. To go through the stages of team development takes time.

"**In order to have a true team-teaching dynamic, the staff must be stable**."

From Pyramid to Participation

"Emphasizing the team dynamic flattens the pyramid of hierarchy," says Kathy Proctor. "Over time, the management style at Child's Day has **evolved** from being highly **authoritarian** to becoming **participatory**."

She was instrumental in implementing the change. "The owners have banking and accounting backgrounds and were operating with a very structured hierarchy. I found that it wasn't efficient or best for the children.

"I showed them a more effective means of communicating. I brought in literature to show how participation has a positive influence."

Why This Form?

The basic structure the center now uses, with a lead teacher and two assistants forming a classroom team, has been in place for about eight years, according to Kathy Proctor.

However, she adds, "**We've been molding the system since its inception**. For example, we experimented with the floating positions. Sometimes they had no room assignments, but we found that it wasn't good. They needed to belong somewhere.

"**The evolving of teams will look different for every school.** It's an individualized process. You need to try different elements and figure out what works for you."

Are There Setbacks?

"Our staff is fluid. We've had a lot of turnover," Kathy Proctor says.

"We used to have a very stable staff, but about two years ago about half of the lead teachers and half of the assistants left. They left for life-change reasons, like going back to school or having to move because a spouse got a new job."

There are four typical stages in creating effective teams. They are commonly referred to as ***Forming***, ***Storming***, ***Norming*** *and* ***Performing***.

"Whenever you get significant staff turnover, you're kicked back to Stage One. We've had to claw our way up to Stage Two. There's lots of storming in Child's Day as a community right now. I believe that it's necessary, and that we'll continue to evolve."

How is Team Spirit Fostered?

"It's critical to give teachers a lot of **autonomy**; to let them make important choices," says Kathy Proctor.

At Child's Day, for instance, staff is involved in **hiring**. Prospective employees are asked to spend a day in a classroom. Their performances are critiqued by other teachers, who also seek input from the children.

Lead teachers sit in on hiring interviews, to discuss the membership, dynamics and expectations of their individual teams.

Other key ingredients in creating a successful team dynamic at the center, according to Kathy Proctor, are **monthly staff meetings**, **weekly one-on-one meetings** of staff members with the director, and both mandatory and voluntary school-sponsored **social events and workshops**.

"Workshops and social events provide the staff with opportunities to network and utilize each other as peer-to-peer resources."

Workshops are designed to reinforce the team focus. For example, the center engaged a motivational speaker to teach the staff techniques for effectively communicating with each other. That event was mandatory, while a follow-up session three months later, offering more sophisticated communication training, was optional.

"Workshops and social events provide the staff with opportunities to network and utilize each other as peer-to-peer resources," Kathy Proctor says.

Each January, there is a goal-setting session, during which staff members are encouraged to air their ideas. They are asked, "Do you feel appreciated?" and, "How will we choose to keep quality in our classrooms high?"

"The teachers itemize their strengths, weaknesses and challenges, and process what to do with that information.

"I want to hear from them. Everyone has a responsibility to contribute to the solution. They have to take that information and turn it into practical action.

"In corporate structure, one's voice is never heard. In team structure, it is."

Focus On Community

Creating a sense of community within the center is another crucial element in successfully implementing the team dynamic, says Kathy Proctor.

To achieve this, teachers are required to choose duties outside of their classrooms that benefit their colleagues. For example, Child's Day has a second-floor resource center that houses supplies. A teacher may volunteer to be in charge of keeping the room stocked and organized for one month.

"Our teachers are responsible to each other. They choose ways to be connected. This discourages territoriality, which can exist in a more traditional setup.

"It's a growth process. It's not perfected here, but we've made great strides in creating a sense of community and showing the staff that it's good."

The Larger Community

Involving the staff in presenting a cohesive image to the surrounding community has been a recent focus at Child's Day.

A committee was formed to formulate long- and short-term center goals and a mission statement. "The staff was told, 'This is what we want to present to the community.' We needed to clarify the center's philosophy. It was difficult for the staff to be fully connected, as they weren't involved in all the steps."

She has studied how other businesses have overcome that hurdle. One model she has found to be useful is Southwest Airlines. "Its president communicates his vision to the staff. It's very participatory management."

Why Do You Believe In Teams?

"With teams, the staff is much happier. They are connected and involved. This is critical. It helps with longevity; you retain staff who clearly understand what the center wants to accomplish. It maximizes their professional development.

"Every voice has influence. Every person has power. It's what you do with it."

Mark Palace

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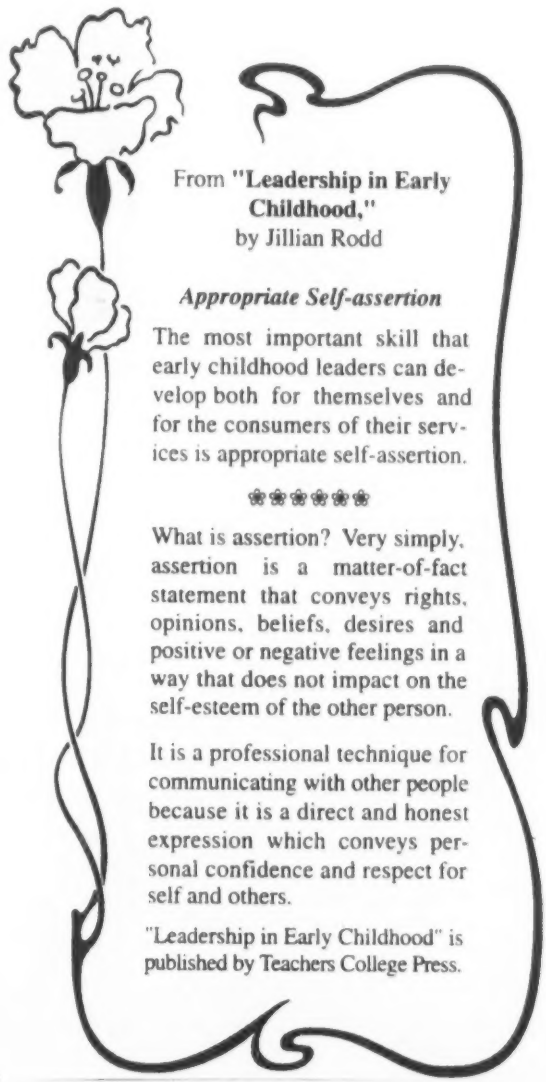

From **"Leadership in Early Childhood,"** by Jillian Rodd

Appropriate Self-assertion

The most important skill that early childhood leaders can develop both for themselves and for the consumers of their services is appropriate self-assertion.

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What is assertion? Very simply, assertion is a matter-of-fact statement that conveys rights, opinions, beliefs, desires and positive or negative feelings in a way that does not impact on the self-esteem of the other person.

It is a professional technique for communicating with other people because it is a direct and honest expression which conveys personal confidence and respect for self and others.

"Leadership in Early Childhood" is published by Teachers College Press.

Tips on Organizing Your Paperwork

Introduction

Barbara Hemphill is the author of Kiplinger's "**Taming the Paper Tiger**" series and "**Simplify Your Workday**." Her work has also been featured in major publications, including Business Week, Wall Street Journal and The New York Times.

She is past president of the National Association of Professional Organizers, and has appeared on national television shows.

A consultant and professional speaker, she is president of Hemphill Productivity Institute in Raleigh, North Carolina.

Here, she shares hints on increasing productivity through organizing paperwork.

Who Is Organized?

Most business professionals, including center owners and directors, need help in getting organized, says Barbara Hemphill, because there are so many demands on their time. "Purging files, choosing computer software, evaluating systems, updating a Rolodex or tackling piles of unread journals frequently gets pushed to the bottom of your list of priorities while you handle today's crisis."

Perhaps the most challenging and persistent threat to good organization is piles of paper. "The reason that paper piles up in your office is that you haven't decided what to do with it," Barbara Hemphill says. "**Clutter is postponed decisions**."

She notes, however, that organization, is not synonymous with neatness. "My definition of 'organized' is very simple. It's based on asking yourself several questions: '**Does it work**?' '**Do I like it**?' and if what you do affects other people, '**Does it work for everyone**?' "

A New Filing System

How important is a good filing system? According to Barbara Hemphill, research shows that the average person spends **150 hours each year** — almost a month's worth of work time — **looking for misplaced information**.

She adds, "An effective filing system will save you time and money and missed opportunities.

"**Information is power** — *if* you can find it when you need it. Unfortunately, in many offices it's easier to find information in cyberspace than in the office.

"Ironically, the only thing in the office that technology has not changed is how we manage paper. Today's filing systems look very similar to what Thomas Jefferson used — only there are more of them, and most of them don't work."

If your filing system isn't working, she advises, "**Don't fix it. Start over**.

"Your best bet is to clean out your most accessible file drawer and start over by filing new papers as you get them. As you need a paper from your old system, incorporate it into the new system.

"After one year, put the remaining papers from the old system into less accessible space, like off-site storage, a garage or an attic — or into the trash can."

Components of The System

According to Barbara Hemphill, "There are three components to an effective filing system: **mechanics, management** and **maintenance**."

Mechanics of Filing

"One of the major reasons we procrastinate about filing," she says, "is that it is simply too time-consuming." She offers these suggestions for quick and easy filing:

- As soon as your file cabinet is too full to easily add new papers, remove old papers or buy new filing cabinets.
- Use hanging folders:

-If you'll only need to remove individual papers, file directly into the hanging folders.

-If you'll need to remove an entire file from the cabinet, create a hanging folder and a manila folder with the same labeling. Place the manila folder in-

side the other. It will then be easy to return it to the proper location.

- Put the plastic file tab on the front of each folder. When you grab the tab and pull forward, you will create the space in the front of the file to drop the new piece of paper, and removing old papers from the back of the folder will be easy.
- Use color to help you coordinate your information. For example, files with tax information could be identified by red dots on their labels. However, don't make the color system too complicated to maintain.
- Use staples instead of paper clips. Clips catch on papers and cause misfiling and sloppy files.

Management of Files

Barbara Hemphill says, "One of the major sources of frustration about filing is **deciding what to name a file**. For example, the same information can be filed under 'car,' 'automobile,' 'Chrysler' or 'vehicle.' And what happens when you want to file the insurance policy for the car? Does it go in 'Insurance - Car' or 'Car Insurance?'

"Today's filing systems look very similar to what Thomas Jefferson used — only there are more of them, and most of them don't work."

"It doesn't matter, as long as you're consistent, but human beings are rarely consistent. And the chances that two human beings who share a file will think of the same word when looking for information is highly unlikely."

Her solution? "Create a **file index**; an alphabetical list of the names of your files. Then, before you make a new file, you can check the index to see if an appropriate file already exists.

"You can use a word processing program to create the index. Print a copy and keep it at your desk. When you add a new file, hand-write the changes on the index, and periodically update the list in your computer and print out a new copy."

She points out that there is software available that enables cross-referencing of computer and paper files.

Maintenance of the System

According to Barbara Hemphill, "**There are only two steps required to maintain any filing system indefinitely**:"

1. Make sure the file index "is a living document — a perfect reflection of the names of the files in your cabinet." If you add a new file, add it to the index, and when you remove a file, delete it from the index.
2. Clean out your files when the cabinet gets too full for easy filing.

Away From The Office

Many of us return from conferences with notes, brochures, travel receipts, names and addresses, and other paper matter. At the time we collect or create them, they all seem important, and why we need them is very clear. When we return to the office, however, they tend to stay in a jumbled, daunting pile.

Barbara Hemphill has a way to avoid that. "**Every piece of paper you collect can be put into one of three categories**. They are **Toss**, **File** or **Act**.

"Play a game with yourself to see how much you can get into the wastebasket before you get back to the office."

On business trips, she suggests, bring three **folders**, with the following titles:

- **File**

Inside the folder, have a copy of your file index. When you collect a paper that simply needs to be filed, check the index and write the correct file name in the upper right corner of the paper. When you return to the office, filing will be easy.

- **Act**

Use this folder to hold papers that require actions when you return. "Write a reminder in the corner, or carry a pad of Post-Its."

- **Call**

Having this file encourages you to use a spare few minutes to make one or two quick calls.

Other suggestions she offers for traveling:

- Keep tax-deductible receipts together in an en-

velope. It will be easier to record the reasons for the expenses right after you return than to try to reconstruct them later.

- Write the date and circumstance on each business card you collect. When you get home, put the business cards for those people you might want to contact on your Rolodex or in your computer. Put those cards you are not comfortable tossing, but are not sure you'll need in a box in your desk drawer.
- Carry stationery to write thank-you notes or other quick responses.
- Keep a "To-Do" List of specific ideas you plan to implement when you return home. Prioritize the list when the trip is over, and enter reminders of actions you want to take on your calendar.

Using the Wastebasket

"Research shows that we use only twenty percent of what we keep," Barbara Hemphill notes. **"But how do you decide what is the eighty percent you can throw?"**

She advises asking these questions for each piece of paper:

- ❒ **Does this require action, or was it only for my information?**
- ❒ **Does it exist elsewhere?**
- ❒ **How difficult would it be to get again?**
- ❒ **Is it recent enough to be useful?**
- ❒ **Does it have tax or legal implications?**

And finally,

- ❒ **What's the worst thing that could happen if I didn't have this piece of paper?**

"If you can live with the results, toss it."

Two Final Suggestions

"When you're tempted to postpone a decision about a particular piece of paper," Barbara Hemphill suggests, "Ask yourself, 'What am I going to know tomorrow that I don't know today?' "

Her final advice: "Good business practice dictates that every organization should have an 'Annual File Clean-Out Day.' "

For more information, contact:

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1464 Garner Station Blvd.
Raleigh NC 27603
(800) 427-0237
www.productivityconsultants.com

"Taming the Paper Tiger at Home," "Taming the Paper Tiger at Work" and "Simplify Your Workday" are available in bookstores or from Hemphill Productivity Institute.

From **"Taming the Paper Tiger at Work,"** by Barbara Hemphill:

So, *NOW* What Do I Do?
(Hint: Today's Mail is Tomorrow's Pile)

It's a big mistake to think that the way to "get this office organized" is to start with the backlog.

Guess what happens when you start that way? While you're working on last week's stuff, today's information pours in. Unless you deal with it right away, it becomes next week's backlog. You get bogged down and give up.

Start by putting the most recent papers in your "In Box" — today's mail as well as papers that require action.

Put the old papers in a box under your desk, or in a bottom drawer. If you need something fairly recent, you'll know to dig through the "In Box;" it's less likely that you'll need something from the old pile — if you had, it would have risen to the top of the heap already — but you can still find what you need.

As time allows, you can pull papers out of the old pile and merge them into your new system. The old papers will be easier to handle anyway once you've set up a system you understand, and in many cases, you'll probably be able to throw them away.

Being An Entrepreneur: Interview With Mary Hessler Key

Introduction

Mary Hessler Key, Ph.D., is a business consultant, speaker, author and executive coach. The company she heads, Mary Key & Associates, has advised firms such as Georgia-Pacific and Bausch & Lomb, and she has served as executive director of Inc. magazine's Eagles CEO Program.

She has an undergraduate degree in early childhood education. Recently, she implemented a project for a major child-care chain.

We asked Dr. Key to tap both aspects of her background and help owners and directors to apply her expertise to running their centers.

Know The Trends

In her book, "**The Entrepreneurial Cat: 13 Ways to Transform Your Work Life**," Mary Hessler Key explains the importance of what she calls "**entrepreneurial thinking**." We asked her how owners and directors can begin to think and act like entrepreneurs.

"Know the key trends of your marketplace and ask, '**What are we doing to address those trends**?' " she says. "We now live in a business culture where competitive edge depends greatly on innovation.

"Create the vision and the plan on how to achieve it, then get out of the way."

"Ask, 'How can I look at this with a fresh pair of eyes?' Then act and implement those ideas. One of the biggest challenges is to stay proactive rather than reactive."

And don't despair if a new plan doesn't work. "Let it go. Another good idea will be in the queue."

Creating A Vision

In "The Entrepreneurial Cat," Dr. Key shows how feline traits, like independence, curiosity and fearlessness, can be applied to running a business. One of the most important qualities, she says, is focus. "**Like a cat that stays focused on the hunt, entrepreneurial thinkers must also be relentless**. They can't allow themselves to get distracted by the phone, people or competing demands.

"Create a vision, which leads to focus. Ask, 'What's important here?' **Have specific goals that are both quantitative and qualitative, and involve everyone in creating those goals**." Examples she gives: to enroll a certain number of children, have zero accidents or generate more publicity.

Delegating

She points out that involving everyone in creating and achieving goals is a big step in helping a director manage time and keep the business running smoothly. "Realize you can't do it all, and ask yourself, '**Who can I involve who would enjoy doing these other tasks? Who can handle them**?'

"Develop projects that support the goals you and your staff have developed, and assign a person to be accountable for setting deadlines and scheduling meetings for updates.

"Be sure to recognize milestones that are reached.

"**There is a temptation to stay too involved in the nuts and bolts**. Ask, 'How do I engage and motivate people in the work?' Create the vision and the plan on how to achieve it, then get out of the way."

Keeping Focused

Mary Hessler Key says, "Great leaders create ways for the system to stay focused on what is important.

"For example, Granite Rock Company wanted to be more customer-focused, so they told the customers that if anything on the invoice didn't seem fair, to deduct the cost. This kept the staff very focused on the customers. You'd think that this policy would be abused, but it wasn't, and it involved everyone.

"**Develop a mechanism for reinforcing what is important**. One example is a reward and recognition system." Rewards, she adds, can be more money or special perks like being treated to lunch or getting a day off. Mention on the center's bulletin board, announcements to the staff and children, articles in the school newsletter, acknowledgement at parent meetings and personal notes of appreciation are examples of recognition.

Staff Training

One of the most common errors in staff training, Dr. Key says, "is the assumption that everyone needs the same training.

"The largest staff issues are interpersonal skills and attitude. You can't teach the right attitude."

"Are you personalizing the training, so that each staff member gets the guidance he or she needs?"

Difficult Staff Members

Chronic difficulties with particular staff members can often be traced to hiring practices, according to Dr. Key. "**The first fundamental question is, are you hiring primarily for attitude or a person's past experience**? The largest staff issues are interpersonal skills and attitude. You can't teach the right attitude."

If a staff member is causing problems, she suggests, "Meet privately, one-on-one. Lay out your perspective and be specific about behaviors. Say, 'These behaviors indicate that you are not happy here.' After indicating why the behavior is unacceptable, ask, "What would you do in my position?' Finally, ask the person, 'How do we work together?' "

Becoming Known

Dr. Key has these suggestions for publicizing your center:

"**Focus on the great stories that the center has about staff members**. Collect them and communicate them to staff, parents and the media.

"Develop relationships with people who work with children, or who write about them for newspapers and magazines, and maintain contact with them."

Final Words

Mary Hessler Key advises owners and directors to maintain balance in their lives. "Sometimes they're so busy that other areas of their lives fall through the cracks, and then the business suffers.

"Seek a balance between your business and personal life. Know ahead of time when your breaks are coming. Once every quarter to get away for down time is a good formula."

Mark Palace

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"The Entrepreneurial Cat: 13 Ways to Transform Your Work Life" can be purchased online or by calling (800) 929-2929.

In **"The Entrepreneurial Cat: 13 Ways to Transform Your Work Life,"** by Mary Hessler Key, "Jazzie," a cartoon cat, teaches humans to use feline traits to improve their businesses. Here is an excerpt from that book:

Groom Those Who Groom You

Whoever says cats are aloof is barking up the wrong tree.

We're social animals. We groom friends and even mere acquaintances, helping each other reach the spots we can't reach alone.

Be independent, but don't isolate yourself. Find others you can trust, and build relationships.

Be a catalyst—groom those who would look less sleek without you.

By helping others to be at their best, you'll achieve your best, too.

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Problems With Parents: Joining the Dialogue

In previous articles in this series, we talked about what to do when parents complain about their child being bitten by a classmate, and how to deal with parents who seem to constantly complain. We asked readers to share their ideas.

Here is one response.

Biting

Debra Gaetano, director of **Harkness House for Children**, licensed for 67, in Winnetka, Illinois, says:

"We deal first with education of parents, especially the parents of the bitten child. We let them know that it can be caused by a variety of reasons.

"We give the bitten child a ton of attention and the biter no attention.

"After parent education, and after intervention by the speech and hearing professional, the teachers do shadowing. For example, when a toddler-age child has bitten several people, or the same person several times, for a week or two — when there's a pattern — we shadow the child.

"Reports are given to the parents of the child who is bitten and those of the biter. If Joe bites Amanda twelve times, reports are made and we meet with the parents.

"We tell the parents of the biter, 'For one or two weeks, a staff member will shadow your child; will be responsible for your child every moment of the day. When the person sees biting begin, he or she will redirect — offer a book or a toy, for example — before your child has a chance to bite. We want to teach your child that there are alternatives to biting.'

"Sometimes you need to put in an extra staff person for this. It's difficult. Staffing is a tremendous issue for all of us.

"If biting continues over time, we suggest seeing a pediatrician. It could be a physical problem. We found out that one child who was biting had an ulcer. It caused burning, and she'd bite when it burned. With guidance from the pediatrician, we removed tomato-based and citrus foods from her diet, and she stopped biting.

"If a child persists in biting, we must consider the safety of the other children in the program. We may have to make the decision that it won't work out.

"We make a clear distinction in written records and reports between biting, meaning that the skin was broken, and putting one's mouth on another person. Breaking the skin can cause infection and disease.

"I don't think we've ever had a child with broken skin from biting. Normally, we put on the form, 'Joe placed his mouth upon Jennifer's hand.' We have a litigious society. If the child is diagnosed with Hepatitis B in several years, we won't be liable, because you can't get it by placing a mouth on a child."

Here is another response:

Complaints

Mary Hessler Key, president of **Mary Key & Associates**, a business consulting firm, offers these suggestions for dealing with a parent who complains:

"Engage the parent and ask, 'What would you like to see happen to address that?'

"Move the conversation to what is possible, or say that you need to think about this and come back. **Take time**. **You don't have to put pressure on yourself to come up with a solution right away**.

"Create a forum where parents can share their complaints, and make time to really listen and empathize. You are more likely to keep parents if their complaints are fully expressed."

Do you agree or disagree with the ideas expressed here and in the previous articles in this series? Is there additional information you could add that would help other owners and directors?

Please join this ongoing dialogue, sharing your thoughts on these and other parent problems. To do so, contact Christine Kalbaugh, publisher.

Books for Parents and Teachers

Three books published by Preschool Publications are excellent resources for teachers and parents in your program.

"**The Parents' & Teachers' Guide to Helping Young Children Learn:** ***Creative Ideas from 35 Respected Experts***" has 355 pages. It is divided into ten sections:

- **How Young Children Learn**
- **Language Development**
- **Reading - Writing - Arithmetic**
- **Sharing Literature**
- **Imagination - Creativity**
- **Music - Movement - Art**
- **Science - Nature**
- **Trips With Your Preschooler**
- **School**
- **Computers**

"**Guiding Young Children's Behavior:** ***Helpful Ideas for Parents and Teachers from 28 Early Childhood Experts***" has 329 pages. It is divided into nine sections:

- **Guiding Young Children's Behavior**
- **Communicating With Young Children**
- **Teaching Children Responsibility**
- **Coping With Stress in Special Situations**
- **Coping With Stress in Everyday Situations**
- **Keeping Your Child Healthy**
- **Exercise and Fitness for Young Children**
- **Young Children's Safety**
- **Finding the Positives**

"**My Self, My Family, My Friends:** *26 Experts Explore Young Children's Self-esteem*" has 307 pages. It is divided into eight sections:

- **Encouraging Young Children's Positive Views of Self**
- **Being an Individual**
- **Growth and Development**
- **Balancing Activities and Relaxation**
- **Feelings**
- **Encouraging Young Children's Positive Views of Family**
- **Encouraging Young Children's Positive Views of Friends**
- **Caring and Consideration for Others**

The books are organized similarly.

Each section opens with a brief **introduction** by Betty Farber, in which she presents an **overview** of the main **educational, behavioral and developmental concepts** to be discussed.

Sections are divided into chapters, each covering a **different facet** of the section topic and written by a professional specializing in an appropriate area. Contributors include nationally recognized authors as well as established leaders in the fields of education, child development, psychology, science and the arts.

Each chapter has a concise discussion about how a **learning or behavioral goal** is related to aspects of **child development**, and offers guidance for leading a young child toward that goal.

Chapters in "**The Parents' & Teachers' Guide to Helping Young Children Learn**" suggest specific **materials and activities**. Several have calendars with thirty-one days of activities.

At the end of each section in the three books are annotated lists of related **resources** for children and adults.

Whimsical black-and-white **drawings** illustrate main points throughout the books.

Speaking With the Editor

Betty Farber, M.Ed., president of Preschool Publications and editor of the three books, has thirty years of experience in early childhood education.

She taught at and directed programs in St. Louis and Memphis, and was instructor and early childhood coordinator at LaGuardia College of the City University of New York. She is a long-time member of the advisory board for the Early Childhood Resource and Information Center of the New York Public Library.

Betty Farber created "Parent and preschooler Newsletter" and was its editor for eleven years. Its purpose, she told JCCA, was to help early childhood professionals educate parents on how to promote their children's healthy growth and development.

"After the newsletter was sold in 1996, I decided that the articles we had would make excellent books. They fell into three major categories: Learning, Behavior and Self-esteem, so each book is on one of these categories."

Summary

These wide-ranging, carefully planned and organized books are very valuable resources.

"**My Self, My Family, My Friends**" is addressed to parents, and the other two books are a bit more directed to parents than to teachers.

However, the numerous creative and effective activities in "**The Parents' & Teachers' Guide to Helping Young Children Learn**" will enrich preschool classrooms, and the three books provide overviews of good philosophy and practice that can instruct aides and serve as refreshers for teachers. The resources listed are equally beneficial to educators and parents.

In her section introductions, Betty Farber gently puts forth solid principles of child development and shares the wisdom gathered through her years of experience in early childhood education.

Succinct and interesting, the books present sound, developmentally appropriate educational philosophy in clear, readable language, and enumerate dozens of specific ways to put it into action.

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The books are available online and in bookstores. They can be ordered directly from Preschool Publications at the above address, or through its website.

Here are excerpts from the books:

The Parents' & Teachers' Guide to Helping Young Children Learn

From Chapter 36, "*In Sharing Nature, Questions Mean More Than Answers,*" by Laura Carey

Take your daughter or son outside to a park or field or your yard — wherever you can find a little green space. Now watch. Your child is experiencing many things for the first time. And so might you, if you look at things he or she is looking at.

Being smaller and closer to the ground, your child will notice things crawling in the grass. He may be watching a ladybug walking delicately up the stem of a flower.

Look closely at it. How does it move its legs? What is it using its antennae for? What do the mouth parts look like? Does it stop to eat anything? Let it walk on your hand and then your child's (carefully). Does it tickle? Can you feel it?

Guiding Young Children's Behavior

From Chapter 7, "*Alternatives to 'Don't!'* " by Harriet Heath

The problem with saying "Don't" is that the command gives children no direction. It does not tell them what they can do. It does not inform them about what the problem is in what they are doing. It does not let them figure alternatives.

The assumption seems to be that if children learn what not to do they will automatically know what to do. That is not the way children learn.

"Don't" simply says to stop. This is necessary when the action is life-threatening, but it is deadening to their curiosity and enthusiasm when constantly used.

My Self, My Family, My Friends

From Chapter 31, "*Children's Friendships,*" by Betty Farber

You can find ways to help your youngster learn the positive results of sharing.

If your preschooler refuses to share his playthings, you could point out a few similar toys: "Look, here's a dump truck, a pickup truck and a fire truck. Which one can Jeffrey play with?"

When your child answers, "The dump truck," you can praise him for sharing. With a loving pat you can say, "Thanks, honey. Jeffrey looks so happy because you shared your toy with him."

Words of Inspiration

JCCA suggestion: Use these inspiring excerpts to motivate yourself, your staff and parents.

Post them on your bulletin board and use them for meeting topics.

From "**Discipline for Life!**" by Madelyn Swift

It is the difficult children, the troubled children, the dysfunctional children, who require us to be skilled, trained, professionals.

We are not making plates here; if a mistake is made with a plate, it becomes a second and sells for less. We cannot afford the luxury of seconds in our work. No child is a second.

Although we get many chances with each child, in the end, we do not get another chance with youth and early formation of self-esteem and estimate of personal value.

Pleasure, fun, joie de vivre — joy in living is a need we all share.

No matter who we are, there will likely be more than enough dark times. It is part of our job as humans to help create moments of delight, enchantment, fun, joy, merriment, and happiness.

What else are we going to remember when we are old?

"Discipline for Life!" is available from:

Stairway Education Programs
2100 Northwest Highway, Suite 1068
Grapevine, TX 76051
(800) 422-4337

From "**Winners and Losers**," by Sydney J. Harris

*A winner makes **commitments**.*
*A loser makes **promises**.*

*A winner **works harder** than a loser, and **has more time**.*
*A loser is always "**too busy**" to do what is necessary.*

*A winner goes **through** a problem.*
*A loser goes **around** it, and never gets past it.*

*A winner says "**Let's find out**."*
*A loser says, "**Nobody knows**."*

*A winner says, "There **ought to be** a better way."*
*A loser says, "That's the way **it's always been** done."*

*A winner takes a big problem and **separates it into smaller parts** so that it can be more easily manipulated.*
*A loser takes a lot of little problems and **rolls them together** until they are unsolvable.*

*A winner knows that **people will be kind** if you give them the chance.*
*A loser feels that **people will be unkind** if you give them the chance.*

*A loser thinks there are **rules** for winning and losing.*
*A winner knows that **every rule in the book can be broken,** except one — be who you are, and become all you were meant to be, which is the only winning game in the world.*

*A winner **appreciates** the irony of fate, and the fact that merit is not always rewarded.*
*A loser is **cynical** without appreciating the irony of fate.*

*A winner **rebukes and forgives**.*
*A loser is **too timid** to rebuke and **too petty** to forgive.*

*A winner **acts the same** toward those who can be helpful and those who can be of no help.*
*A loser **fawns** on the powerful and **snubs** the weak.*

*A winner hopes for a miracle **after** everything else has failed.*
*A loser hopes for a miracle **before** anything has been tried.*

"Winners and Losers" is no longer in print.

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Issue 221

A National Publication Addressing The Concerns Of:
Child-care Centers Learning Centers Preschools Nursery Schools Kindergartens Intergenerational Centers

CONTENTS

Working With a Board of Directors:
Interview With Susan Sahovey 1
Mission Statement Showcase 8
Curriculum for Including Children With Disabilities, Part 1 9
Creating A Parent Survey: Interview With Margot Adams 13
Hot Topic Forum 16

Working With a Board of Directors: Interview With Susan Sahovey

This is the first in a series of JCCA articles on working effectively with boards of directors.

Introduction

Susan Sahovey, M.ED., is administrative director of **The Village School of Boxford** in Boxford, Massachusetts. She also teaches early childhood courses at Endicott College.

Prior to her current position, she was director of two other preschools. Each of the three schools has a board of directors.

The Village School is licensed for 175 children between the ages of two and five.

Q With what kinds of boards are you familiar?

A Basically, there are three types of boards:

- **Policy-making** board, which oversees the center and gives responsibility to paid staff to carry out its decisions,
- **Advisory** board, whose members act as consultants to the center, and
- **Active** board, which sets policy and participates in the day-to-day running of the center.

Q Are there differences between boards of directors, governing boards and trustees?

A The terms are basically interchangeable. Which one is used depends on the bylaws of the organization.

Q Do for-profit centers ever have boards?

A That depends on the owner. The NAEYC likes parents to be involved in an advisory capacity. They generally don't run the center. It's usually a PTO kind of parent involvement.

They don't serve in the same capacity as in a non-profit center.

Q You're a voting member of your board. Who else is on the board?

A It's made up of current parents and those with children enrolled during the past two years.

Q What are your views on having board members from the general community?

A I know of some centers that use boards from the community at large. That's difficult to do.

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Part of the appeal is that community people can be more objective, but they don't know the needs of the school. The number of necessary meetings can be staggering. You have to spend a tremendous amount of time educating them. It takes a good six months to bring them up to speed on board issues.

Q Are there other membership options?

A I think my board is heading toward more community involvement; to having parents who had some involvement at one time, even if their children aren't currently enrolled or haven't been in the past two years.

It seems like a good middle ground between keeping those restrictions and opening membership to the entire community. We'd be including people who already know what the school is about.

When boards include parents with previous involvement, they often seek those with special skills that will help the center. Examples would be lawyers, doctors, educators, and people with building or real estate backgrounds.

"There used to be conflict because the relationship between the director and the parent board hadn't been clarified."

When you allow people who don't have children currently enrolled, you get the perspective of someone with a broader picture. If you have only current parents, they tend to vote according to how the issue will affect them personally. Raising tuition is a good example of that. The others can be more objective.

Q How many people are on your board?

A At the time I was hired, the board had grown to between twenty-five and thirty-five people. *Everybody* was on the board. It was difficult to come to any kind of consensus because there were too many people involved.

The board rewrote its bylaws, limiting its size to eleven to thirteen members. Now it can have from seven to nine members.

Presently, we have:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary/Human Resources Person
- Treasurer
- Activities Coordinator
- Fundraising Person
- Two at-large Members
- Center Director

This has made a big difference in getting information to people. It's amazing how even four fewer people make such a difference.

Q How else has your board changed?

A There used to be conflict because the relationship between the director and the parent board hadn't been clarified.

Then they made the director a voting member of the board. It's now a partnership rather than an employer-employee relationship.

Another new bylaw that helped a great deal addresses not sharing what goes on at board meetings with teachers, parents or the community. At first, I found I was spending a tremendous percentage of my time putting out board fires. Now that has changed because they've learned to deal with confidentiality issues.

Q What other problems have you had?

A In my first year, I was given a list of goals. They were mainly created by the old and new chairs and the human resources people.

Unfortunately, those goals hadn't been shared with the new board. I was coming up against a lot of walls, getting complaints from board members about the very things I had been asked to change. I said that the goals had to be shared with the full board and the staff.

There was lots of miscommunication, and it was intensified by our having two campuses. Some board members weren't appropriate in their responses to parents. For example, they might answer, "I don't know why she's doing that."

The board needed good communication and protocols.

Q How was that problem solved?

A The next year, we had an orientation. For four or five hours, we talked about different issues. For example, we came up with a process for responding to parents — record what is said, and so on. In other words, board members would be held accountable for what they were saying.

I told them, "When two children have problems, we give them words to help them work them out. We should apply the same to adults. Yes, a parent can go to a board member, but that parent should go to the director first."

Board members learned to deflect; to ask, "Have you spoken to your child's teacher?" or "Have you talked to Sue?" They might say, "You'll probably hear from Sue, and we'll talk about it together." Before that, it wasn't clear who was in charge.

The orientation was videotaped for those who could not attend.

"It's crucial for a board to develop formalized recruitment and orientation processes."

Q Is it uncommon for a center director to be a voting member of the board?

A It's extraordinarily uncommon. Usually, the director reports to the board.

Q How are your board members chosen?

A We have a screening and interview process.

We send letters to parents, asking whether they're interested in serving on the board. They have to complete a form. Some of the questions are:

- What position (treasurer, secretary, member-at-large, etc.) are you interested in?
- What experience and skills will you bring to the board?
- What do you hope the school will achieve in the coming year?
- Are you willing to attend monthly meetings?
- Will you make a two-year commitment?

The questions on experience and skills and what they hope to achieve are the most important ones.

Those who want to serve have to go before a nominating committee that includes the center director, the board vice president, another board member and two parents who are not currently on the board but who are involved with the center through fundraising or other activities.

Q How important are such formal procedures?

A It's crucial for a board to develop formalized recruitment and orientation processes.

Q Is it difficult to inform people that they haven't been chosen?

A The vice president is the one who has to tell them they didn't make it.

One person who didn't make the cut the first time went on to later become the board vice president. At the time she first applied, they needed someone with different skills because of issues they had to deal with at the time. The person who told her it wasn't a good fit did it so well, worded it so well, that she wasn't discouraged.

Of course, we don't normally have tons of people applying to be board members.

Q How long is a board member's term?

A Two years.

Q Can a member serve more than one term? Unlimited terms?

A A member can renew or apply to change a position. Terms are unlimited, as long as a person has a child currently enrolled or enrolled within the past two years. Some people have several children, so they could serve for many years. One chair served for ten years because she had so many children.

Most parents, however, only want to serve one or two terms, because their children leave and the parents become involved in their elementary schools.

Q What are your board's duties and powers?

A Their main focus is ensuring the financial stability of the school. Their second mandate is ensuring the long-term stability of the school itself. An example of that would be providing benefits so they can recruit and retain teachers.

The board hires and fires the director and gives the director a yearly evaluation.

The board works on the school's long-term goals; the big picture. The director deals with the day-to-day concerns.

Q Is there give-and-take in the board's evaluation of the director?

A Yes.

If they say something needs improvement, I can say that in order to make that improvement, they have to take certain measures.

For example, the board wanted our business manager to put the books onto the computer and use accounting software. I said that she had too many auxiliary duties, and in order for us to comply, we would need them to take these measures: hire a consultant to work with her, compensate her for the extra hours, and get additional teachers for the extended day program.

They agreed to those requests. The board had to make financial concessions to get what it wanted.

Q How often does your board meet?

A It meets once a month. We have no meeting in December, so I send the members a memo noting issues they may have to deal with at the next meeting.

When I started here, the board was only meeting once every three months. There wasn't enough communication.

Q Who can attend board meetings?

A Anyone can attend a regular meeting, but only certain people can attend an executive session.

Private issues like personnel or financial matters or grievances against teachers are handled by the executive committee, and members have to abide by a confidentiality agreement. Anything discussed in executive session can never be disclosed.

There are legal ramifications to not keeping certain matters confidential.

The members of the executive committee are:

- President
- Vice President
- Secretary/Human Resources Person
- Treasurer
- Center Director

Q What does the human resources person do?

A I think the position takes on different meanings for different boards.

Typically, the human resources person looks at insurance coverage, medical and pension plans, and so on, in the same way someone with that position in a firm would do.

Our board's HR person also acts as a sounding board for the director in personnel matters; if there's an issue with a teacher, for example.

I've used her as a mediator in staff issues; problems between two staff members or the director and a staff member. The HR person helps the parties come to a solution or compromise.

Before I terminate a teacher, I speak to the HR person. This helps me to be sure that I'm being reasonable and doing it correctly – that I'm covering the school legally, have given the teacher enough opportunity to improve, and so on. The HR person has to keep it all in confidence, because the executive board must maintain confidentiality.

The board also uses the human resources member to help with the director's review process; setting up goals and determining whether the director is meeting them.

We try to get someone with experience in counseling, social work or working as an HR person in a company. This is easy for us because we're in a wealthy community, but it's not as easy for every board.

Q Do you attend all board meetings?

A Yes. If the issues to be discussed involve me, however, I'm excused. Sometimes I excuse myself.

Q If you could, would you change the structure or the general procedures of your board?

A I think it's a pretty good model now for a board. I couldn't say that six years ago.

I do wish the terms were longer. People aren't in the program long enough to be fully informed and make good decisions. In our case, that may be "the nature of the beast." We have a big turnover of members because we're in an affluent community and there have been many executive job transfers. For instance, next year only one board member will be returning.

The board lacks continuity because of people coming and going. If several members could serve three-year terms, there would be more continuity.

I'm the only one with historical perspective. That tends to be a problem. Their perspective is just based on facts on paper. I have to bring them up to speed without getting annoyed.

"Board members should be ambassadors for the center, promoting it at cocktail parties and soccer games."

Q Are you seeking other improvements?

A One thing I'm pushing for is self-evaluation of the board. We have to ask ourselves:

- How effective are we?
- Are we meeting the goals of the school?
- Are we living up to our mission statement?

The board has to set goals for the board as a whole. We've tried to do it for individual committees and officers, but problems fell through the cracks.

Our goals have to be measurable.

Q Do you think most center directors work in harmony with their boards?

A There's almost always conflict.

Working with a board is one of the most difficult parts of a director's job.

Q What are the main sources of conflict?

A It's usually about two areas: how money should be used, and how the teachers' and director's time should be used.

Q What have been your own major sources of conflict?

A My biggest issues with boards have been money and educating people on the board — explaining why we do what we do.

I'm always having to educate members about what the school is about. They want to know, for example, "Why do we have to compensate teachers for planning time?"

They don't understand the planning and effort that go into teaching young children. There are always issues of respect for teachers of this age group.

Working with a board takes a tremendous amount of time. It takes great energy to make children a priority. Every decision I make is based on what's best for children. When I have to debate parents on what's important, it takes away from that.

I know I have a real gift for helping teachers to help children, but I can't do it when my time is spent stroking board members.

Constant turnover and reeducation wear on you. You could be putting that time into helping children.

Q In addition to their official duties, what can individual board members do for a center?

A Board members should be ambassadors for the center, promoting it at cocktail parties and soccer games. They should be "PR-ing" the school and being positive about what's happening there.

Q Besides attending meetings, how can a center director maintain close ties with the board?

A I've always made a point of sending them newsletters that inform them about various issues, like parent concerns and school policy.

For example, every year parents question the philosophy of the school, which is a developmental preschool. They want to know why the children aren't learning a letter a week, and so on. The board members should be able to answer their questions. They have to understand what a developmental preschool is.

I always include a section on staff issues. I tell them, for instance, when a teacher will be out because of a very ill parent. I tell about the facility: "We need vanities in the bathroom." Or I might write, "The licensing agent came in, and we passed with flying colors."

I call sending them newsletters before meetings getting them "prewired." It prepares them for the meetings. That way you don't have to spend meeting time bringing them up to speed.

"Part of a board's responsibility is to give you specific written goals and provide you with feedback on how well you're meeting them."

I've learned through experience that when you don't prewire people for board meetings, you're setting yourself up for some awkward situations. For example, you might have told one or two people about the topics, but not others. It gets into personal issues: "Why wasn't I told?" This way, you get the material to everyone at the same time.

A good chair will say, if people aren't ready, "You should have read it. We're not going to spend meeting time on it."

Members have to come to a board meeting prepared. That way, they feel active in the decision-making. They have the information.

Q What do board presidents need to know?

A It's crucial to know how to run a good meeting.

For example, many boards don't know how to reach consensus. Our present chair has a rule that we can't leave the room until some sort of consensus is reached.

Before that, issues were decided by voting. Discussion was cut off, and it led to really difficult situations. People feel that they're not being heard.

You can't always reach consensus in a two-hour meeting. Another good technique is to table the idea and bring it up at a later meeting. But you have to agree not to talk about it while it's on the table; then you get people jockeying for votes. At the next meeting, you work through that issue before going to the next agenda item.

There are also problems that individual members can cause at meetings, and board presidents need to know how to handle them. One big one is that some members don't talk at all, while others dominate.

A great technique is to ask people to hold up red ("I'm against this."), green ("I agree with how the discussion is going.") and yellow ("I have questions. I'm still uncomfortable.") cards. They're also a very useful tool at staff meetings.

If people don't have a chance to speak at meetings, they go into the community and speak inappropriately.

Q Do you have other advice for running a good board meeting?

A I recommend these procedures that we follow:

Before each meeting, a different member of our board reads our mission statement to the group.

Our mission statement and our ground rules for meetings are also posted as a visual reminder.

Q What ground rules do you recommend for board meetings?

A Some suggestions are:

- Listen to each other.
- Be respectful of each other and the opinions of each person.
- Be honest about your feelings.
- Give credit where it is due.
- Reach consensus.

Q What else might directors tell boards?

A Evaluation of the director is one of the responsibilities of a board.

I give workshops for directors on how to work effectively with boards. Many of the participants

haven't been evaluated, and they're surprised that I'm evaluated every year. Their boards deal mostly with financial matters.

With no formal evaluation, you have no feedback on how you're doing as a director. If you have a cantankerous board you can, without warning, suddenly be out of a job.

Part of a board's responsibility is to give you specific written goals and provide you with feedback on how well you're meeting them. You have to be judged on those specific goals. They can't change them during the year.

I once had a board that wanted to evaluate me midyear on what they were upset about — their agenda. I said that if they did that, it would be a breach of contract. I hired an attorney.

Also, a director shouldn't just get evaluated at the end of the year, so that the results are a surprise.

It all comes down to accountability. Who are you accountable to? Who am I accountable to? If the answers are unclear, you have problems.

Q What was the worst situation you were ever in while dealing with a board?

A In about my second year, there was a board meeting at which I was attacked. It reminded me of the saying that it takes twenty years to build a reputation and five minutes to destroy it.

I wanted to leave, but I knew that if I could survive the attack, I'd get to what I call the "other side."

The issue was implementation of the curriculum. I found while walking through the classrooms of our two sites that all the teachers were doing something philosophically different. There would be traditional teaching in one room, a few learning centers in another and a fully developmental curriculum in a third. One room would have worksheets; the one next to it would have open-ended activities.

I said, "We're all going to be developmental." Each teacher had to determine what changes to make to become developmentally appropriate.

"Some of the people who were my greatest adversaries then are now my best supporters. They saw me come through to the other side."

Some teachers said they weren't comfortable and were going to leave. Parents whose children were in their rooms were upset. It was a new board, and the meeting was out of order from the beginning.

It was probably the worst experience I've been through on a professional level. I kept saying to myself, "I have to get to the other side."

Some of the people who were my greatest adversaries then are now my best supporters. They saw me come through to the other side.

Q How does your board handle membership transition from year to year?

A I believe that my board does an exceptional job of making that transition.

In May, there's a dinner for both the old and the new board.

We have a tradition of buying a special children's book for the school to represent each person who's leaving. For example, we bought "The Rag Coat," by Lauren Mills. It's about a poor child who has a coat made out of scraps of material. The other children make fun of the coat, but at Show and Tell, Minna explains that each scrap came from something that was once precious to one of her classmates. The children begin to see beauty and meaning in the coat, and to appreciate Minna. The whole idea is a sense of community. That's the book we gave to a departing human resources person. It's a thank-you that reflects the person's tenure on the board.

In June, we have an orientation meeting for new and returning members. We go through current issues, discuss protocol and talk about how to be a good board member.

We hold the first board meeting in August. We've found that it's better than in September. It's too hectic then.

Q What basic advice would you give a director who will be working with a board for the first time?

A I'd take the time to have coffee or lunch with each board member individually; to get to know them all.

Talk about their ideas; what they think about the school. Ask, "What would help you as an ambassador?"

That way, you find out what's on each person's agenda.

Q **Do you have advice to add for directors?**

A I have given the board/director relationship a great deal of thought.

Many directors are leaving after two or three years, because of conflict. If they can get through the crisis and build credibility, they can get to the "other side."

A good relationship with your board isn't something that's going to happen in a year. You have to build your reputation — get people to know and trust you.

Whatever you do to let them know who you are and where you stand will help. A board member told me, "I know what your priority is; it's with the children." Of all the people on the board, I have no hidden agenda. I point out that I have nothing to gain but improvement of the program and of the care each child receives.

You have to build credibility — show that you're not acting on behalf of one interest group. You have to maintain neutrality and demonstrate that the well-being of the children is your only consideration.

Building a good relationship takes time. Not everyone is coming at it from an educator's heart.

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Aspen has books relating to boards of directors and other aspects of nonprofit administration.

Mission Statement Showcase

This is the first in a series of articles featuring mission statements of child-care centers and other organizations dedicated to young children.

In this issue, we feature **The Village School of Boxford** in Boxford, Massachusetts:

The Village School is a positive first school experience which instills the joy of learning, expands friendship, builds self-confidence and appropriately prepares the children for future learning.

We embrace a developmental curriculum where children are a first priority, are recognized and appreciated as being unique, and learn at their own pace.

According to Susan Sahovey, the center's administrative director, the mission statement is read at each board meeting by a different board member. It is on the center's brochures, parent handbook, meeting agendas and other written material, and is prominently displayed at all board meetings.

"Our mission statement took about three hours to create. It was developed by past and present board members, the director and teachers. There were about twenty people involved, led by a facilitator.

"It took a long time to come to consensus, but it was worth it."

If you would like to share your center's mission statement with our readers, e-mail (JCCA@bestweb.net), mail or phone Christine Kalbaugh, publisher.

Curriculum for Including Children With Disabilities, Part 1

Basis for the Curriculum

We spoke recently with **Mary J. Sullivan Coleman** and **Laura Krueger** about the preschool curriculum they developed. It is published in book form by AbleNet, a company that provides learning and communication aids for people with severe disabilities.

The premise is clearly illustrated by the book's title, "**Play & Learn: A Motor-based Preschool Curriculum for Children of All Abilities**." Based on current research regarding motor development, communication, psychology, learning and child development, and best practices for teaching young children, the curriculum works on several levels.

To begin with, it emphasizes servicing the **whole child**. The common practice has been for a therapist to remove a child with special needs from the classroom and work on motor skills exclusively in a clinical setting. This curriculum uses **play activities** to work on those same skills in the **natural setting of the classroom**. In the process, **social and readiness skills** are developed as well.

The book also fosters a **team** approach. Instead of isolating the work that therapists do with children with disabilities, therapists, teachers and families are all considered important team members.

Inclusion is a major thrust of the curriculum. By incorporating assistive devices that promote mobility, stability, manipulation and communication, even **children with severe disabilities can participate in all of the activities**. The activities, and even the way materials are set up, continually foster interaction among children, including those with special needs.

The Authors

Mary J. Sullivan Coleman is an occupational therapist, and Laura Krueger is a physical therapist. They work together at **Normandy Park Education Center**, a preschool setting in a public school.

Normandy Park serves approximately one thousand children from birth to age five, and of those about one hundred have special needs. Those children spend two days a week in a self-contained classroom and two days in a regular classroom with special education teachers accompanying them.

Q For what ages is your curriculum designed?

A It was created for children from two years old to age five or six, and it's also appropriate for some older children with disabilities.

Q Is your curriculum meant to stand alone?

A It could stand alone, but we've found that preschool teachers have such great ideas. They can fit these activities into their existing programs.

Q How was it developed?

A We received special permission to do our research together for a master's thesis in developmental disabilities. We wanted to create more than a thesis.

In the past ten to fifteen years, there has been a lot of new research on motor control. It was already known that children learn from movement. We wanted to find out how they can learn through various motor activities, so we immersed ourselves in literature on the subject.

We combined what we learned in that and related fields with our research on best practices for preschool, and that's how our curriculum developed. It took us about three years. We used it and changed it as we learned from the children we work with.

Q Are there differences between young children with disabilities today and those of a generation ago?

A Yes.

Because of advances in medicine and technology, many more children are living today who would not have been likely to survive previously. That includes premature infants as well as those with various other problems.

Because of those factors, there are now many younger children with special needs, and children with more complex disabilities. It's a different population.

We found that the little ones didn't want to go out with us from their classrooms. We went to graduate school to find better ways to meet the needs of these younger children.

Q Why is it important for therapists, teachers and families to work as teams?

A Children with special needs require repetition, and they need to be highly motivated.

To have therapy twice a week has no real impact by itself. We need to teach others, so that we're all doing the same activities. It's a transdisciplinary approach.

We also found that social interaction was a big influence in motivation. Children need peer-to-peer rather than exclusively adult/child interactions.

We see adults as coaches; facilitators.

Q In your introduction, you say, "The activities are designed to motivate children to try activities they might avoid in free play." Why is that important?

A Many children with special needs have trouble with fine motor activities. Given free choice, most would shy away from them.

It has also been noted that many boys don't enjoy pre-writing and drawing activities.

We believe that today even children who don't have disabilities tend to have fine motor problems, because they don't do the kinds of manipulative activities children used to do, now that they're using computers and playing video games. People think that they're developing those skills by doing those activities, but it's not the same as using play dough. That's why we paid very close attention to small motor development.

We looked at all the areas of development that all children need, and we tried to determine how to highly motivate them so that they develop skills in all of those areas.

Q What are examples of ways you motivate all children to participate?

A We try to make activities as functional and meaningful as we can.

We want to motivate all children to move more. When they ride tricycles, for example, we add gas pumps, road signs, mailboxes and toys to the course, to motivate all the children to ride, fill up with gas, do other activities that people do in real life, and keep going.

"We found that the little ones didn't want to go out with us from their classrooms. We went to graduate school to find better ways to meet the needs of these younger children."

We use juice can lids for a lot of games. We attach Velcro adhesive to the backs and put them around the gym and the hallway with pictures and stickers on them. We have a basket on every trike. They can collect the lids and trade with friends. It's much more motivating.

Q Your curriculum is for typical children as well as those with special needs. What benefits does it have for typically developing children, that might not be found elsewhere?

A We spent a lot of time looking at other curriculums. Everyone knows that young children learn from moving, but we found that too often, preschool children were sitting at desks doing worksheets.

So much learning can come through movement. It helps all children to learn better. We didn't find that in other curriculums.

Movement helps to facilitate social skills and language — using words like "under," "through," "over" and "around," for example. They transfer those skills to other environments. Adding language to a movement activity makes it more meaningful and more fun.

Even the children with disabilities that we teach are very varied in their abilities. That's why every activity in the curriculum can be individually adapted.

You set up the play areas, and they're a basis on which to build.

Q In your book, you discuss the tactile, vestibular and proprioceptive senses. What are they?

A They are often called the "hidden senses," because people aren't as familiar with them as they are with taste, sight, and so on, but they're so important to how children learn.

- **Tactile:** This is the sense that lets us know that our knee hurts, or lets us recognize an object in our pocket without seeing it. It's the ability to know what something is with just your touch, not using your vision. We learn so much through that sense.
- **Vestibular:** This is the sense of movement; knowing where our body is in space. Some children have disabilities in that area, and others are considered clumsy or uncoordinated. They need to learn to process that information and develop their gross motor skills.
- **Proprioceptive:** This is the sense of body position. It involves feeling input into the muscles and joints when you're moving; for example, jumping on a trampoline. Or when you're at a table, you know your knees are bent. Many children with special needs can't do that.

Children with vestibular and proprioceptive problems stay close to the ground. They don't want to go on slides. If they come down a slide, the information they get isn't accurate, and it's scary to them. This can affect every other area of their learning.

"A child with disabilities doesn't have to sit alone in a corner, but can participate in the same activity."

The tactile, vestibular and proprioceptive senses keep a child's brain alert and help the child organize information through the nervous system.

Q Do preschool teachers need special training to use the assistive devices incorporated into your curriculum?

A They definitely can use them without special training.

The devices are very simple to use. They come with clear instructions, and our book is very detailed, with illustrations.

Q What is an example of an assistive device?

A One of the easiest pieces to use is a voice output communication aid. It gives the child a voice.

It's easy to record anything; a song, for example. An adult or child can record a 75-second message into the device. When a child presses it, it will play what was recorded.

Q What are examples of ways to use a voice output communication aid?

A Whenever possible, we want to give children choices. This device can help us do that. For example, during an art activity you could ask a child to choose yellow or orange paint. You could have two voice output devices, one with each message.

Of course, the child could just point to the yellow or orange paint, but the device actually *says* the word. The child's peers can hear what the choice is.

Some children with disabilities can't sing along, but they can activate the device to sing the song for them.

And it's very portable. A friend can program into it what they did together: "Today we played with play dough and sang 'Wheels on the Bus.' " Then the nonverbal child can contribute to family discussions when they're all sitting around the dinner table talking about what they did that day. The family can also record a message for the child to take back to the school.

The next level is to use the communication device to operate a battery-operated or electrical toy. For example, using a wire that comes with the device, a child with a disability can push a button to activate a Paint 'N' Swirl to paint a cutout. Another child can dispense the paint with a squeeze bottle. They work together.

Children without disabilities love these devices. They say, "Push the button!"

What we're looking for is for children to participate with their peers. We looked into activities that every preschooler does. A child with disabilities doesn't have to sit alone in a corner, but can participate in the same activity.

Q What else would you like administrators to know about including children with special needs?

A Inclusion benefits everyone. It's just as important for typical children.

Children with special needs are in our communities. You fear what you don't know.

Preschool-age children have the most open minds. They keep the attitudes they learn at a young age all through their lives. It translates into acceptance; tolerance.

Over the years, there has been a major paradigm shift. As we see results, we'd never go back to the old ways of educating children with disabilities separately. Inclusion is the best way to service children and empower families.

Regular teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals and therapists have to work together.

Structure of the Book

"Play & Learn" is a 314-page, 8 ½-inch by 11-inch spiral-bound book.

Introduction: This section gives the rationale for the curriculum. It familiarizes the reader with major concepts of physical and occupational therapy and discusses how the curriculum combines them with current educational thought. The purpose of each play area is explained, and overall suggestions are given to get the most out of each group of activities.

Getting Ready for the Year: This tells, in detail, how to create and adapt materials for the year.

Each month's materials are stored in a labeled box, to be reused in subsequent years.

Monthly Activities: For each month, two pages are devoted to each play area.

The left page lists the materials needed for the activity, describes how to prepare the play area and explains the activity in detail.

The right page is titled, "Trying Another Way." It is set up in exactly the same way as the left, but the materials are simple assistive aids that enable children with disabilities to participate fully in the month's activity.

Examples of assistive materials are:

- **Communication Aids**: Songs or spoken messages may be prerecorded, to be activated at will by a child by pressing a large button.
- **Picture Communication Symbols**: These may be placed on communication aids. If the aid has a song about a bus, for example, a picture of a bus is placed on top.
- **Cordless Switches and Receivers**: Operated by battery, these allow a child to activate electrical and battery-powered devices — a slide projector or toy, for example — from a distance.
- **Battery Device Adapters**: These adapt battery-operated toys and appliances so that they may be used by children with disabilities.

Both left and right pages have photos showing children doing the activities. Most pages have "Tips" for maximizing, varying or extending activities.

Recommended Books: At the end of each month's activities is a list of books related to the monthly theme. The books were chosen for their literary value as well as for their reflection of cultural diversity and diversity of ability. Several books in each list are starred to show that they particularly promote ability awareness.

Resources: Companies from which toys and equipment for the curriculum may be purchased are listed with contact information.

Functional Motor Checklist: In this chart which is designed to be copied for each child, skills are categorized under these headings: ***Classroom Arrival and Departure, Circle Time, Art Activities, Snack Time, Mobility, Gym and Playground.***

Under each heading are listed six to fourteen skills. Under Art Activities, for example, are: 1. Removes/replaces caps on markers, 2. Grasps markers/paint brushes functionally, 3. Draws/scribbles within the confines of paper, 4. Tears off a piece of tape from dispenser, 5. Uses scissors, 6. Uses stamps and ink pad.

Each child is to be evaluated for each skill twice a year, by checking off "***Performs Independently***," "***Needs Physical Assistance***" or "***Needs Verbal Assistance***."

Bibliography: Books on motor development and inclusion are listed.

In Issue 222, the eleven play areas of the Play & Learn Curriculum will be described.

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Creating A Parent Survey: Interview With Margot Adams

This is the first in a series of JCCA articles on conducting parent surveys.

Introduction

Margot Adams is director of **The Children's School at St. John's**, a nonprofit center in suburban Philadelphia. The school is NAEYC-accredited and is licensed for fifty-nine children, ages three months to six years.

We recently spoke to Margot Adams about parent surveys.

Needing Answers

In the early spring of 1999, Margot Adams and her staff were in the process of planning their budget for the following fall.

The major question of whether or not the school should expand, as well as other concerns, like which aspects of the center's program should continue, were factors in formulating how the budget would take shape.

Answers were needed to questions like:

- Should more playground equipment be added?
- Should we offer a breakfast or lunch program?
- Should existing programs such as field trips, music and cooking activities be continued?
- Are family events like Fathers Night Carnival and Thanksgiving lunch important enough to continue to be included?

One method of evaluating the importance of these and other aspects of the program was getting direct feedback from parents by creating a survey.

Designing the Survey

How does a director develop an effective format for a parent survey? For The Children's School at St. John's, the answer was in human resources.

"It was a combination of myself and two parents who are psychology professors at St. Joseph's University and who have a lot of experience with surveys," says Margot Adams. "One of the parents is on our board of directors.

"We came up with the questions and they came up with the format. Then psychology students tabulated the results as a class project."

Format

The chosen format allows parents to rank the importance or level of satisfaction regarding specific areas of the school's facilities, programs and faculty on a **scale of one to five**, thus providing more specific feedback than a straight "yes or no" format. The five-page survey was divided into six categories:

- **General Information**, such as what room the child is in and how the parents found out about the school
- **Overall Satisfaction**, with factors like location, cost, child/teacher ratio, quality of programming and attitude of staff

- **Teaching**, focusing on parent/teacher and child/teacher interactions
- **Classrooms**, including arrangement, cleanliness, condition, and supplies of toys and equipment
- **Playground**, emphasizing importance of specific pieces
- **Programming**, including special programs, extracurricular and school activities, special events, memos, proposed programs, parent-teacher conferences and school expansion

Involving Teachers

Teachers should be involved in creating a parent survey, according to Margot Adams. "We include the teachers in most of what we do here. **After the survey was finished, they were given copies to see if there was anything they wanted to add.** Some of my teachers have children enrolled here, and they filled out the survey."

Surprises

Did the results of the survey surprise the staff?

"**We were surprised with the response on expansion**, because we have a waiting list here and it's very difficult to get your child in. We were expecting a lot of people to say 'yes' to expansion, because then they'd have a better chance of getting a second child in or of getting more days.

"What we found out was that part of our charm and why people like the school is that we're on a somewhat smaller scale than some of the larger centers. So we were surprised when a good percentage of parents said 'no,' not to expand."

"We don't want to be too formalized, and we don't want to bombard parents with questionnaires and surveys."

Did It Bring Change?

As these results show, parent surveys don't always demonstrate need for significant change. A director can also find out that existing programming is on target, so that the survey reinforces the direction in which the center is already going.

"**The changes we were possibly going to implement, we didn't**, because there didn't seem to be enough interest in things like breakfast or lunch programs.

"The survey results **reinforced our other activities** like music and field trips, so we continued with them. We also have a lot of special programs that include the whole family, and that was shown to be very important.

"As part of working toward accreditation, we had to send out an NAEYC parent questionnaire. That survey brought out one or two minor aspects that we did change. For example, we found that people who responded that we don't do evaluations were new parents who hadn't experienced one yet, so we added a second evaluation in the fall, in addition to the one we already had in the spring.

"The one in the fall is more of a social evaluation. It includes comments like, 'He's adjusted to the room. He likes arts and crafts.' and questions like, 'Are you happy with us as teachers? Would you like to see anything you're not seeing?'

"In the spring, we do more of a developmental checklist with parents; more of an academic evaluation on where the child is: Did he accomplish all the goals for a three-year-old?"

Can Parents Judge?

Determining whether a program is on or off target through parent feedback raises the question of how qualified parents are to judge teachers on specific aspects of their teaching.

"I feel that if parents are involved in the school, they are capable of giving a fair assessment," Margot Adams says.

"The way we recorded the results in the end was to first get a general total and then split it by rooms. Some questions are specific to teaching. They involve teacher/parent and teacher/child interaction. You could see rooms where we had particularly strong teachers."

Going Beyond the Questions

In order to get the most input possible from parents. the center's cover letter asked parents to be as specific as possible and invited them to add comments.

Several questions listed facets of the program and included a space for "Other," so a parent could include an area that might have been overlooked.

When to Survey

How often should a center formally survey parents?

The Children's School at St. John's conducts parent surveys every other year. Why not more often?

"**We have a high involvement with parents, and there is a lot of verbal communication**. We don't want to be too formalized, and we don't want to bombard parents with questionnaires and surveys."

Staff workload is also a factor. "**I feel that if we send out parent surveys, we have to get back to them**. We don't want to say to parents, 'Fill out this questionnaire,' and then not get back to them with the results. We have to tell them which suggestions we're going to use, which we're not, and why. That's a lot of work."

What to Include

The essential aspect of a good parent survey, Margot Adams believes, is diversity.

"**We try to include all the components that make up quality child care**; teacher skill, programming, classroom environment, toys and equipment, playground, and so on. You should be pretty diverse on your survey.

"**Give parents the opportunity to express their views**. You don't want just the positive answers, because that's really not going to help you. Our goal was to find out what we were *not* accomplishing. Sometimes you think you're going along just fine and then, at the end of the year, a parent says, 'We never did this,' or 'We never saw this happening.'

"A survey is a perfect opportunity to bring out suggestions; to determine the needs and expectations of parents and to find out where you're on target and where you're not."

Final Advice

When creating a parent survey, Margot Adams concludes:

"Determine what your needs are. Ask yourself why you're doing the survey. Have specific goals, and make it easy to fill out."

Mark Palace

For more information, contact:

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Here is an excerpt from a parent survey by The Children's School at St John's:

Programming

	Not Satisfied		Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1 Are you satisfied with the yearly progress report and parent/teacher conference?	1	2	3	4	5
2 Are you satisfied with the letters and memos that are sent home?	1	2	3	4	5
3 Are you satisfied with the calendars of events that are posted on the classroom doors and bulletin board?	1	2	3	4	5
4 Are you satisfied with the number of special events?	1	2	3	4	5

5 How important is it to keep the following special programs?

	Not Important		Important	Very Important
Holiday Show	1	2	3	4	5
Spring Family Picnic	1	2	3	4	5
Fathers Night Carnival	1	2	3	4	5
Mothers Day Tea	1	2	3	4	5
Halloween Parade	1	2	3	4	5
Thanksgiving Lunch	1	2	3	4	5

Hot Topic Forum

JCCA is beginning a series of "hot topic" discussions. We want to know our readers' opinions on various controversial issues that affect the early childhood field.

We'll initiate discussion on each subject by randomly surveying readers, and we invite you to add your own opinions or respond to theirs.

This is our first question:

Should teachers and student teachers be permitted to have visible tattoos or nose, tongue or other face piercings?

Susan Grogan, director of Creative Years in Saugus, California, says:

We are in the business of making a difference in the lives of children and families.

If parents are afraid to enroll their children with us, for any reason, we cannot fulfill our purpose.

Of course, we must meet the needs of staff, too, but the ultimate standard we hold ourselves to, to make a difference in the lives of children and families, is the most important of all.

Dianne Keel Atkins, director of Roche Child Care in Nutley, New Jersey, says:

Any piercing which may prompt a child to imitate is not allowed in our center. Safety is my major concern.

Leslie Slan, director of Broadman-Kaplan Early Childhood Center in Rockville, Maryland, says:

I have mixed feelings on this question. Since it is so difficult to get quality staff in early childhood education, if a staff member is well qualified in every other way, I think tattoos, body piercings, nose rings, etc., should not interfere with hiring that person.

We teach our children to be accepting of differences, and if a person is a really good early childhood teacher, that is what should count.

Laura Skinner, executive director of Community Education Center in Redwood City, California, says:

Since we are placing ourselves in a position of moral obligation, there are two issues here:

1. As teachers, we encourage children to develop individuality and follow their own hearts.

But:

2. There is a certain amount of dignity aligned with the teaching profession. This means that while we support individuality, we must also encourage children to have respect for their bodies and know that they do not have to deface what they have.

Why would a person pierce his or her nipple or belly button?

In my home, I was required to wait until I was sixteen to have my ears pierced, because my father wanted me to make up my own mind. I have pierced ears, but that's it.

Children need to respect their bodies, and with this there is a dignity and love for ourselves that tattooing and body piercing degrades.

Children wonder why adults deface their own bodies with tattoos and piercings while we, in the same breath, tell them not to smoke and do drugs, which are other ways of defacing their bodies.

Love what you have, and keep it healthy. We are the models by which our -- and other people's -- children model their own lives. Let's be careful!

Helen Andresen, owner of Iliff Preschool in Denver, Colorado, says:

My center is licensed for 223 children, ages one to fourteen. We have been serving the southeast Denver community for over thirty-seven years! I have had many years to learn to appreciate and love diversity.

Beauty of the world takes many forms. If we bring "pieces" of this world into our programs, the unfamiliar becomes familiar, and now we have experiences that can initiate thoughts and conversation. With the understanding gained from those "pieces," barriers can be broken down. Prejudices won't grow roots.

Those with piercings and tattoos and those without should not be seen as opposites. Rather, it is our common sameness that makes us effective in the classroom.

What do *you* think? If you have strong feelings on this subject, e-mail (JCCA@bestweb.net), mail or phone us with your opinion. We'll publish as many responses as possible.

If you have ideas for other "hot topics" to discuss in our forum, please contact us.

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